VRAJANATHA VADAJENA

JANAKI BALLABHA MOHANTY



SAHITYA AKADEMI

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

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Janaki Ballabha Mohanty

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A Political Retrospect

In the literary history of India, the eighteenth century is considered as an era of sterility devoid of cultural development. This era, in fact, does not give much evidence of the powerful personalities enriching the stream of socio-cultural life through their creative works. However, there are a few isolated cases of some eminent figures whose presence served to dispel the darkness and herald the approach of the dawn. During this century in the land of Utkal (Orissa) was born such a person of talents whose literary output to a great extent nullifies the charges of barrenness levelled against the century. He was Vrajanatha Vadajena, a revolutionary poet and a man with a vision of the future. In a remote corner of India in the backward princely state of Dhenkanal in Orissa he saw the light of the day in the year 1730.

From the political point of view the eighteenth century was the darkest period of Orissa. During this period Orissa was under the dual rule of the Marhattas and the Mughals. Since they were in constant conflict, Orissa, for the entire period, was torn by civil strife and disorder.

With the fall of the prosperous Hindu rule in 1568 started the political decline of Orissa. During the Mughal rule for a century and a half thereafter, there was hardly any literary development in the region. This was because the administrators appointed directly by the rulers in Delhi were not sons of the soil. The nature of their appointment was mainly responsible for making them disinterested in the development of the land and its literature. Their main object was to collect revenue and depart to Delhi soon after the termination of their tenure of office. However, there was one positive aspect of the Mughal rule in Orissa. The people got acquainted with the ways of the Mughal court-life and Persian, Urdu and Hindi languages which the Mughals used for their official transactions.

The Mughal rule was chiefly confined to the coastal areas. With the end of the Hindu rule small princely states sprang up in the interior parts away from the coastal areas which came to be called *Mughalbandi* as these regions were under the direct control of the Mughals. The Mughalbandi area was ruled by the Mughal subedars and Cuttack was the headquarters of the Mughal administration. Therefore, the erstwhile Hindu rulers of the land, the kings of the Bhoi dynasty of Orissa, receded from Cuttack, their old capital, and built their new capital at Khurda about 60 km to the south. Though weak and powerless politically, the Bhoi kings received great respect from the people of Orissa as they were the devotees and chief caretakers of Lord Jagannatha and were quite influential still. Our poet Vrajanatha during his life time witnessed the rule of three kings, Gajapati Rama Chandra Dev (1727-36), Gajapati Virakishore Dev (1737-1793) and Gajapati Divya Singha Dev (1793-1798) who were ruling a small part of Orissa from their capital Khurdha.

The representatives of the Mughal emperor (Nazim or Subedar) who ruled Orissa from 1727 to 1741 were Sujauddin (1727), Mohammad Taki Khan (1728-35) and Mursid Kulli Khan (1735-41). To please their Badshah in Delhi they continually harassed the Hindu kings of Orissa. Time and again, Puri, the citadel of Lord Jagannatha, and Khurdha, the capital of the Bhoi kings, were attacked. During this period a conflict broke out between Murshid Kulli Khan, Subedar of Cuttack and Alibardi Khan of Bengal and it lasted for a long period. Towards the end of the conflict Murshid Kulli Khan was defeated and he fled from Orissa. The Dewan of Murshid Kulli Khan in order to avenge the defeat and humiliation of his master joined hands with King Raghuji Bhonsle I of Nagpur. Raghuji in his turn sent his commander Bhaskar Pandit to Cuttack. Although Bhaskar Pandit was successful in his venture to capture Cuttack he lost his life in 1744 as a result of a plot by Alibardi Khan. After this incident Raghuji attacked Cuttack and occupied it in 1748. There were continuous conflicts between the Marhattas and Alibardi Khan from 1748 to 1751 and Cuttack being the centre of administration happened to be a point of conflict too. The authority over Cuttack changed frequently between the Marhattas and the Mughals, whoever was victorious. After ten years of continuous battle an

agreement was reached between Alibardi Khan and the Marhattas in 1751. It was agreed in the treaty that the Marhattas would continue to rule from the south of the river Subarnarekha down to the Chilika lake. Thus, with the decline of the Mughal empire, Orissa came under the rule of the Marhattas.

During this period Virakishore Dev, the Bhoi King of Khurdha, aided the Marhattas in their invasion of Orissa. Taking advantage of the weakness of King Virakishore, the king of Parala attacked Khurdha and defeated him. The vanquished Virakishore Dev sought the help of the Marhatta Subedar Shivabhatta Sathe (1756-1764) and was able to redeem his capital Khurdha. After the capital was occupied by him, Virakishore Dev failed to pay the money he had agreed to pay the Marhatta Subedar. As a result he had to surrender a large part of his kingdom to the Subedar.

The Marhattas, after that agreement, ruled over Orissa for nearly fifty years till 1803. Although Orissa during the period was apparently under a strong rule, yet looting and civil wars were frequent. The cultural and literary scene was utterly colourless as the Marhatta rulers, like the earlier Mughal rulers, were utterly indifferent to it. The people were oppressed by the burden of taxation and were living under the strain of continuous fear. However, during the reign of Maharaja Virakishore the condition of Orissa was to some extent better. In this connection, the observation of historian Kedarnath Mohapatra is relevant to note : "During the reign of Raja Virakishore Dev the establishment of Marhatta rule in the coastal areas of Orissa brought about a notable change. The people of Orissa felt a sense of relief about the temple of Jagannatha, the main religious institution of the Hindus, which remained free from any further depredation. A few mutts (monasteries) and temples were established. Poets and scholars living in the mutts, temples and under the patronage of the petty ruling chiefs felt secure enough to continue their pursuit of knowledge. In spite of many adversities and misfortunes of Virakishore his long reign (1737-93) witnessed the production of a number of useful works both in Sanskrit and Oriya. "[1] It was the period of the literary activities of Vrajanatha.

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1. K. N. Mohapatra, Khurdha Itihas, p. 207

2
The Contemporary Literary Scene

Strictly speaking, Oriya literature acquired its remarkable form and features in the fifteenth century. It is in this century that the great poet Sarala Das laid the foundation of Oriya literature on a sound footing through his mythological works. In the sixteenth century with the spread of Vaishnavism Oriya literature received a great impetus at the hands of the five saint poets known as 'Pancha Sakha' (the Five Friends). The language of the works produced in this era was simple, lucid and appealing to the common people as the saint poets wrote mainly for them.

But during the period of the Mughal administration most of the poets and scholars took refuge in the courts of petty rulers and produced a different type of literature exclusively meant for the elite and the learned. A few ruling chiefs and zamindars during this time also devoted themselves to literature. For a long time martial exercises were suspended. Most of the petty rulers of Orissa lived a life of luxury and indolence. To please the ruling chiefs merged in sensuality the poets of the time wrote romantic and amorous poetry relating to the amorous lives of princes and princesses. The poets attached to the courts used to receive for their services occasional presents—costly garments, ornaments, cash and landed property. Vrajanatha similarly came under the patronage of the chief of Dhenkanal. For his services as a court-poet he received some landed property and occasional presents for his sustenance.

Sanskrit "Reeti Kavya" tradition greatly influenced Oriya literature during this era. Many narrative poems were written in Oriya in imitation of the Reeti Kavya in Sanskrit. Hence, this period of Oriya literature has also been named 'Reeti Yuga'. The most prominent poet of this literary era was Upendra Bhanja, the prince of Ghumusar estate. His literary works centred round the love affairs of princes and princesses, their union, separation and reunion. The long poems were mostly romantic and amorous in nature. Vrajanatha, during his early period as a poet, was greatly

influenced by the poetic ideals and conventions of Upendra Bhanja and employed them in his early works.

Another influence on literature during the period was that of Vaishnavism. Many poets also wrote devotional songs relating to the divine love of Radha and Krishna. As a result the literary scene of the eighteenth century became rich in lyrical compositions on *Krishna Leela* which were also meant to be sung. The poetic themes being more or less fixed, the poets of this period engaged themselves mostly in making stylistic experiments, inventing new metres and employing them in their poems. These experiments made this literary era particularly rich in metrical excellence.

It is to be noted that the Oriya language unlike Sanskrit and Hindi is not suitable for the metre based on *matra* or syllables. The reason is that the difference of accented and unaccented syllabes (*Laghu* and *Guru matras*) is not as much discernible in Oriya as it is in Hindi and Sanskrit. The pronunciation of Oriya words lacks stress or accent either in the beginning, middle or at the end. Hence, Oriya poets base their metres on *varnas* or letters of the alphabet instead of *matras* or syllables. In other words, the metre is regulated by the number of letters contained in a line of verse. Thus all the metres in Oriya are *barnik* or alphabetical ; syllabic metres are not in vogue in Oriya. During the time of Vrajanatha more than a hundred types of such metres were used in Oriya poems. The poets before writing poems had to get themselves acquainted with the metrical system. Brajanatha also thoroughly practised the art of versification and we find more than thirty-five types of metre and rhyme schemes in his poetry.

Narrative poems in Oriya were generally divided into different cantos and different types of metres were used in different cantos. The poets generally mentioned their names at the end of each canto or in the colophon. In ancient and medieval Oriya literature typical forms of poetical compositions such as *chautisa, poi, boli, padia, koili*, etc., were prevalent. The Oriya langage has thirty-four consonants. A poem with the lines arranged according to the alphabetical order of the consonants used either in the beginning or at the end is called a *chautisa*. *Poi* is a bunch of small poems. It is named according to the number of poems contained in it, the number of couplets used being the same in every poem in the bunch.

A small incident narrated in colloquial language and simple metre is called a *boli*. The type of poems categorised as *padia* is named according to the number of couplets contained in it. As for example *chhabispadia* means a poem with twenty-six couplets . The poem written as an address to the bird cuckoo is called a *koili*. Needless to say, Vrajanatha has employed almost all these forms with sufficient skill in his poetry.

3
The Story of a Life of Struggle

Vrajanatha was born in Dhenkanal which was the capital of a small princely state until its merger in the State of Orissa just after independence. The township is situated at a distance of about 70km from Cuttack, the former capital of Orissa. At the time of the poet this principality was full of dense forests and mountains. The State of Dhenkanal is rich in scenic beauty with the river Bramhani flowing through it. Here there is the mountain Kapilasa with the famous Siva temple which attracts thousands of tourists from all over the country. The lovely place of the ruling chief of Dhenkanal is situated at the foot of a hill. Near it is the village Suna Deipur Sasan where the poet Vrajanatha was born and lived.

His ancestors were employed in the court of Dhenkanal. During his time the ruling chief of this state was Trilochan Mahindra Bahadur. As portrayed by the poet Vrajanatha, he was an able administrator and a good warrior.

Ancient poets were often reluctant to reveal their personal account in their works. But fortunately enough Vrajanatha has given indication of his family background in his poetry. From this we come to know that the original surname of the poet was Pattanaik, 'Vadajena' being a title conferred on him by the king in recognition of his literary merit.[1] But we do not find any clue in his works as to which king had conferred this title on him. There is a legend that the title was conferred on him by the king of Puri, the supreme ruler of the land otherwise known and respected as Thakur Raja (Lord King), in recognition of his creativity and extraordinary skill of writing on palm leaf. He was born in a Karan (Kayastha) family of repute. Time and again he has traced his lineage to the devotional poet Raghu Arakhita.[2]

Raghu Arakhita was one of the devotees of Lord Jagannatha. Rama Das, a contemporary of Vrajanatha, in his popular

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1. *Kelikalamidhi, canto* 16, v. 25-28
2. We are of Sista Karan family, from Ragh Arakhita have we descended.

biographical work in poetry *Dardhyata Bhakti* has dealt with in two chapters (8th and 9th chapters) the life of Raghu Arakhita. Orphaned at a very eariy age Raghu Arakhita came to Puri and sought refuge under Lord Jagannatha. With the Grace of the Lord he could mysteriously meet his wife Annapurna at her residence and escaped from many grave dangers and even from the jaws of death. He and Annapurna lived in a mutt situated at the southern gate of 'Shree Mandira', the great Jagannatha temple, till his death. It is probable that Raghu Arakhita lived in the early part of the sixteenth century. His descendants were employees of the Maharaja of Puri. Later when the Maharaja of Puri shifted his capital to Khurdha, they also accompanied the king. The circumstances which led the descendants of Raghu Arakhita to leave Khurdha and join the service of Dhenkanal state are not known. The evidence which we find in the works of Vrajanatha shows that his father Valunkeswara Pattanaik was an employee of the court of the king of Dhenkanal. He gave his four sons the best education available at that time. His worthy sons were well known during that time as poets and artists. Vrajanatha lived with his brothers in a joint family. In his poems *Ambika Vilasa, Keli-Kalanidhi, Samara Taranga* and *Dasa Poi,* he has briefly stated the virtues of his brothers. His elder brother Jagannatha was also a poet for which he was awarded the title 'Sukavi'. The title of 'Routray' was also conferred on his yonger brother Lokanatha. Jagannatha and Lokanatha were the authors of two poems on Krishna Leela, *Gopi Viraha* and *Vasanta Rasa* respectively.

Born in a family of rich literary tradition Vrajanatha grew into a versatile genius. Besides literature he had acquired proficiency in art also. He could paint pictures on palm leaf with an iron stylus. He was also an expert in the art of drawing on mica, bamboo leaves, vakula seeds and on the tender leaves of the lotus. He could carve and prepare wooden *Vimanas* for the use of idols of gods and goddesses.[3] It is learnt from his poems that he presented such a piece of work to the ruling chief of Dhenkanal, his patron.[4] But unfortunately none of these articles of art and craft has been preserved for posterity. Many of the indigenous works of art of such

3. *Raja Sabha,* stanza 76th
4. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, p. 687

type, during the last two hundred years, have been out of use, lost to us or forgotten. A few specimens of such articles of indigenous art, particularly the paintings on *Patta* (especially prepared cloth), bamboo leaf and palm leaf by unknown artists are found preserved in the Orissa State Museum. In ancient times the texts in Orissa were used to be written on palm leaf with the help of a pointed iron pen (stylus) named as 'Lekhana'. The process of writing on palm leaf which resists facile movement of the pen on account of its fibrous nature is extremely difficult and tedious. Despite this difficulty the letters inscribed on palm leaf by Vrajanatha were extremely beautiful as admiringly acknowledged by the people of his time. Vrajanatha had a profound knowledge of grammar, lexicon, prosody, astronomy, theology and the like. He has revealed in his works about his knowledge of and writings in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindi, Bengali and Telugu languages. This is also evident from his work *Ambika Vilasa.* One of his poems written in Hindi has come to light during the first decade of the present century. But unfortunately his works in Telugu and Bengali have not yet been discovered.

Vrajanatha for various purposes had visited different places of Orissa. In spite of insecurity and lack of transport facilities he had visited Calcutta and toured through some parts of Andhra. One Oriya palm leaf manuscript with his name written on it has been found at Srikakulam in the present Andhra State testifying to this fact. In those days these far off places were not easily accessible. It seems that the poet went to distant places on horseback. In his works the poet has described elaborately different types of horses and different modes of riding. From this it can well be presumed that the poet was a good rider. His wide acquaintance with the ways of the world is evident from his works.

We are completely in the dark about the early phase and the last phase of his life. His works also throw no light on these aspects. On the basis of internal evidences a few of his works have been identified as belonging to the later part of his life. We learn from his writings that during his youth, in order to compete with scholars and poets, he had visited the courts of different rulers of Orissa, most of whom were not of refined taste and merit. Thus the poet had described the Rajas of his times :

2

I have already seen many kingdoms,
And have personally met serveral Rajas.
They have given me many generous gifts,
Yet, is any one of them the equal of my master !

Some Rajas are good looking but without good qualities,
Some having good qualities are ugly to look at,
Some again are handsome but not brave,
Some though brave are too impatient to understand.

Some capable of understanding are addicted to drugs,
Some find pain in giving anything to others,
Some are rich but cannot be approached,
Some never move out being under the control of women.

Some do not do what they say,
Some speak the truth but do not appreciate merit.
Some recognise merit but their powerful officers
Reduce the reward of two hundred to hundred only.

Some are under the influence of wine and some of women
Some spend the whole time in eating and sleeping,
Some are guided by officers, some by some others,
Some are given to play,
Some to dance and music.[5]

As the real admirers of talents among these rulers were few and far between, it was not unlikely that the poet might have returned disappointed from many royal courts. Lazy, pompous, whimsical, stubborn and amorous as the ruling chiefs were, it was natural that Vrajanatha failed to establish a rapport with them. Even for a certain period he had strained relationship with Raja Trilochana, the chief of his native state Dhenkanal. In this connection the presumption of the late poet critic Dr. M. Mansingh about the poet is noteworthy : "Endowed as he was with unusual talents, this man could not possibly play the part of a sychophant at a court, like the mediocrities that generally gather round seats of power. That

5. *Samara Taranga*, canto 7, v. 26-30

temperament seems to have been the main cause of his suffering."[6]

In spite of the inhospitable conditions of the time and all the sufferings and frustrations of his life the poet continued to be in the service of literature. From time to time he presented his works of art and poetry to the rulers of different estates. He used to sing and recite his poems before the chiefs and maintain his family with difficulty from the honoraria he received from a few. His visits to the court of Darpani, Keonjhar and Puri are recorded in his writings.[7] Although his father and an elder brother were employees of the court of Dhenkanal he as a regular employee could not continue there permanently. The poet with his slendar income could not improve his financial condition. Probably in his youth he roamed from place to place in pursuit of artistic experience and knowledge and was indifferent to material well-being. In the later part of his life his financial condition further deteriorated. After the death of his father and elder brother he had to bear the entire burden of the family. He composed the poem *Samara Taranga*, glorifying the deeds of Raja Trilochana, the ruling chief of his state, and presented it to him. As a reward he received the village Nuagan and its adjoining lands as *jagir* for his maintenance. But this place at that time was stony and covered with tangled woods and was thoroughly unfit for habitation. The poet, naturally, could not get any benefit out of it. In fact he became over-burdened with debt. Hence, in the later part of his life he had no means of support and was forced to seek financial help of or rather an employment under the ruling chief of Dhenkanal, his old patron. [8]

As he continued his literary pursuits the poet in course of time became old. Expressing before his old master Trilochana about his misfortune in the old age he says, "Only because of writing on palm leaf I have become weak and emaciated. My back, loin and neck have become arthritic and I do not have the strength to stand erect at the age of sixty".[9] He was really unable to manage his family consisting of fifteen members. However, his prayer to the king for

6. *History of Oriya Litrature*, p.156
7. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, p.637
8. *Samara Taranga*, canto 7, v. 41-47
9. *Rajananku Chhalokti*, v. 35

help was granted and he got some cash and agricultural requisites such as a ploughshare, bullocks, paddy seeds along with some paddy necessary for his daily consumption. In his prayer to the king on another occasion, he promised to paint pictures and write poems ascribing their authorship to the king if he was given financial aid. He appealed to his patron to purchase his *patta* paintings and painted palm leaf manuscripts in order to remove his pecuniary hardhsip. But the Raja disposed him off by paying him only one hundred rupees in cash. A touching account of his disappointment and disgrace due to the king's apathy is found in his work *Rajananku Chhalokti.*

> The wretch in starvation runs desperately to the palace
> With the hope to put up his grievances before his majesty
> at the dinner time.
> Seeing the king at a distance he bows down,
> Comes running to the palanquin with the hope of relating
> his woes
> So gracious is the Lord his countenance shames the
> autumnal full moon,
> But meeting my appealing glance it turns red like the
> setting sun.
> Like the fish, rising to the surface,
> Shying away from the stroke of the stick on its face,
> I withdraw in fear,
> What sorrows shall I make known to the king !
> In distress of mind my body becomes senseless.[10]

His family had the reputation of treating guests with utmost hospitality. His father, mother and brothers were Vaishnavites. It seems that the poet had some weakness for delicious food. He has described in details the sweets and various types of food, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, peculiar to Orissa in his works *Ambika Vilasa, Chatura Vinoda* and *Gundicha Vije.* He has devoted the entire 23rd canto of *Ambika Vilasa* in describing the food items served to gods, demons and human beings separately according to their taste and likings. In *Gundicha Vije* he has also

10. *Rajananku Chhalokti*, v.26-30

mentioned the special types of sweets and other items offered to the Lord as *Prasad*, which are relished all over the country. [11]

These include *Paiti, Mahura, Pachala, Sakara, Madhuruchi, Kadi, Rai, Ambila, Kanji, Saga, Vaja, Marichapani ghanta, Khechudi*, etc. Sweets include *Amruta Keli, Kakara, Kanti, Rasakeli, Amalu, Tripuri, Suari, Rasapuli, Sarakumpi, Laddu, Khuruma, Kora, Bara, Dalimba, Parijataka, Jhilli, Manda, Poda Pitha, Takua, Pampadi, Nadi, Gaja, Arisa, Puri, Khaja, Adhama, Enduri, Gotika, Feni, Sakara, Karpura Keli, Khua Peda, Tasmai, Manohar, Khairchur*, etc. The non-vegetarian food items include different types of fish and meat both fried or baked in fire and turned into curry besides *Palou* and *Kalia*.

It is learnt that Vrajanatha also spent many years of his life in a village named Kabara on the bank of the river Brahmani about sixteen km from Dhenkanal town. Here under a banyan tree, said to be planted by him before the idol of Ganesa, the poet used to sit daily and compose his verses. His descendants are at present living in this village.

Raja Trilochana died in 1792. After his death the poet left for Puri. It seems that he had the desire to spend the last part of his life in the holy place of pilgrimage of Orissa known as 'Sreekshetra'. During his stay at Puri he had the privilege of meeting Divyasingha Dev, the raja of Khurdha to whom he presented his poem *Gundicha Vije* written on the car festival in Hindi. How he was rewarded and received by Raja Divyasingha Dev is not known. If one remembers the condition of the king, a 'king without kingdom', Vrajanatha might not have received liberal help. Here at Srikshetra he probably desired to lead the life of a devotee. But, as confessed by him, it was too late.

Life is consumed in the fire of emotions
What piety can be achieved
In the fag end of life sliding into death.[12]

Realisation of his inability is still more vivid when he says :

Stupidly the fool surrendered his youth
At the feet of a charming face

11. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, p. 608 and 674

12. *Shyama Rasotschaba*, canto 4,v.17

What pious deeds can he do
In the old age when the body is unstable and restless.[13]

In course of time, during his stay at Puri, he fell a prey to diseases and gradually became incapable of moving about without the help of others. He details his misery in a devotional song :

Unable to move I feed on what I get
Like a heron in the rainy season.
Even God does not know why he created
A python in the shape of a man.[14]

The flickering flame of Vrajanatha's life was extingusihed in the year 1800. His wife offered herself at her husband's pyre to follow him as a *sati* leaving behind their three sons.

13. *Shyama Rasotschaba*, canto 1,12, v. 25
14. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, p. 581

4
In the Realm of Literature

Vrajanatha in the last canto of his poem *Samara Taranga* has given a brief account of his poetic compositions. From this we gather that he had composed poems in different languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit and Khoratha and had employed different poetic forms such as *Chaupadi* (song), *Chautisa, Boli, Chhanda* and *Prabandha* (poem). Besides, he had written humorous stories, satirical verses, heroic poems and lyrical songs on Krishna Leela.[1]

In one of his short poems 'Raja Sabha' speaking about his own proficiency as a poet he affirms, "Now, let me tell you about my poetic ability. I have written poems in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindusthani, Bengali and Telugu and have followed the different forms of poetry such as *Chaupadi, Chautisa, Chhanda, Boli, Poi, Prabandha, Dandaka and Churnaka.* My works include a poem named *Shyama Rasotsava* written in *Sakara Niyama*, i.e. in the alphabetic order of 'Sa', depicting the Rasa Leela of Krishna in twelve cantos; '*Ambika Vilasa*' depicting the marriage of Siva and Uma along with the activities of their son Kumara (Kartikeya) written in the alphabetical order of the letter 'A' (corresponding to Oriya letter अ) and *Vichakshana*, a poem in fifteen cantos, written in the alphabetic order of Va (ब), Va (बा), Vi (बि), Vu (बु), Ve (बे), Vei (बै), Vo (बो), Vou (बौ).[2]

The poet also wrote a few more books in the last decade of his life which have not been discovered as yet.

His works remained unpublished for long. It is only during the present century that most of his works could see the light of the day. The available works of Vrajanatha edited by S. Patnaik have been published in a single volume as his complete works (*Vrajanatha Granthavali*) by the Orissa Sahitya Akademi in 1965. The published works are varied in nature. They may be divided into four categories, i.e., (a) Narrative poems (b) Lyrical poems, (c) Fiction

1. *Samara Taranga*, canto v. 19-22

2. *Raja Sabha*, v.72-75

in prose, (d) Poems written in Hindi. A short account of the works is given in the following pages.

Narrative Poems

Some of Vrajanatha's narrative poems had mythological themes while some had themes based on his own imagination. The poet first engaged himself in writing poems depicting the love episodes of princes and princesses. While writing these poems he has definitely followed the style and manner of Upendra Bhanja, the celebrated poet of Orissa. The two poems written during the early phase of his literary career, *Kelikalanidhi* and *Vichakshna*, appear to have been written between 1755 and 1765.

Kelikalanidhi is a long narrative of sixteen cantos, which has been conceived in the pattern of the sixteen *kalas* of the full moon. The different cantos delineate different types of rhetorical skill in imitation of the *Kavya Prema Sudhanidhi* of Upendra Bhanja. We find frequent use Adya Yamaka, Abana, Pranta Yamaka, Adbhuta Upama, Virodha Rupaka, etc., in this poem.

The theme of the poem, according to the poet, is based on a 'worldly affair' (*Samsara Sammata* as the poet has categorised), that is, an episode of human love. From the colophon of the 10th canto it is learnt that the poem was composed while the poet was a bachelor. The poem has been named after the heroine of the *kavya*. It centres round the marriage, separation and reunion of princess Kelikalanidhi, the daughter of Krupanidhi, the king of Motimala Kataka, with the prince of the land of Suprabham Suprabha. In those days child marriage was prevalent in the royal families. Hence, the young prince, who married Kelikalanidhi when she had not attained her puberty, had to wait for years for the union with impatience. However, the much expected day of their conjugal union was celebrated with amorous delight.

But after a few days the prince, as duty bound and directed by his father, had to take leave of his wife and go to a foreign country. They exchanged their necklaces while taking leave from each other with deep sorrow.

The poet has described thereafter the pangs of separation, particularly of the prince while he was abroad. During this period the prince addressing a cuckoo and a bee gave vent to his feelings.

At last he sent a swan as a messenger to his beloved with a letter describing his grief at his separation from her. The princess received the letter and in return sent a reply full of emotional exuberance appropriate to the occasion. A few days later the prince returned to his palace with due pomp and ceremony and had a happy union with his beloved.

A composition of the early period of his life, this long narrative poem is derivative in style and technique being based on Upendra Bhanja's *Premasudhanidhi.* The story is conventionally romantic, but not without some touch of social realism. It deviates in its theme from the tradition of presenting youthful passion in so far as it relates a young man's love for his child bride and his impatient waiting for the latter's reciprocation.

The next poem *Vichakshana* has come to light in an incomplete form. In his poem *Raja Sabha* Vrajanatha declares that *Vichakshana* is a poem of fifteen cantos. But the available text has only ten centos and even the tenth canto is incomplete. The poem centres round a romantic episode. The striking feature of the work is once again the rhetorical skill and play of words displayed by the poet. The entire poem has been composed according to *Akshara Niyama* or conformation to the order of a particular alphabet. In this work the letter व (Va) has been used either by itself or in combination with one of the vowels as the first letter of each line. In each canto, each line begins with one of the different forms such as va (व), vaa (वा), vi (वि), vu (वु), ve (वे), vei (वै), vo (वो), vou (वौ).

The poet composed the poem in his later period while staying at Puri. The poem begins with a prayer to goddess Vimala, the *Peetha Devi* in the temple of Jagannatha. The poet in the first canto expresses his deep devotion and sense of dedication to the deity which have been reinforced by his worldly adversity.[3]

The poem deals with the marriage of princess Vichakshana with Brajamohana, the prince of Brajasadana. In uniting the young prince Brajamohana with his beloved Vichakshana, divine characters like Narada and Vanadurga played their part. The marriage between them was celebrated in accordance with the social customs and royal tradition. The married couple on the

3. *Vickakshana*, canto I, v. 17

auspicious fourth night of their marriage were united. A few days after, the prince with his newly married wife returned to his capital. They spent their days in amorous activities during the different seasons of the year.

The poem is incomplete being without any treatment of the theme of separation and re-union of the lovers as is usual in such poems. A striking resemblance between the name of the poet and that of the hero leads one to wonder if the poem is in some ways autobiographical but for want of details about the poet's life one cannot be certain about it. Use of 'ব' in various forms as the first letter of each line is reminiscent of *Vaideheesa Vilasa* of Upendra Bhanja, but the style shows greater realism and maturity at places to a discerning reader.

On the whole the two poems *Keli Kalanidhi* and *Vichakshana* though displaying narrative art and rhetorical skill fail to impress the modern reader; for, except love-making and physical pleasures no other aspect of life has been given expression to in these poems. However, if Vrajanatha could not strike any serious or original note, the defect is not entirely his; it was rather due to the over-all influence of his time. Like his great predecessor Upendra Bhanja, he experimented with romantic narratives. Pining for some sort of realism he attempted to make them realistic or *Samsara Sammata* as he calls it. Probably tired of the experiment, he broke off in *Vichakshana* after ten cantos and in later poems turned from princely love to the celestial love of Lord Krishna.

The poem *Syama Rasotsava* consisting of twelve cantos is based on the well-known story of the Hindu mythology—the Rasa Leela of Krishna with gopis or the cowherd maidens. From the colophon of the last canto it is learnt that the poem was composed when the poet was growing old, his youth spent up in sinful activities and pursuit of worldly affairs. Presumably the poem was written after 1781.

The Rasa Leela of Krishna, celebrated on the full-moon day of Ashadha in the season of Autumn, is known as 'Sarad Rasa'. This has been well-described in the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*. In the sixteenth century Jagannatha Dasa, the devotional poet of repute, translated the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* into Oriya. This Oriya rendering of *Bhagavata* in a simple and colloquial style earned immense popularity among the people of Orissa. According to the Sanskrit

Bhagavata, Krishna during the Rasa sports with gopis escaped unnoticed with a certain gopi which consequently injured the sentiments of the other gopis each of whom was eagerly waiting for amorous play with Krishna. The name of this gopi has not been mentioned in the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* but in the Oriya rendering Jagannatha Dasa has named this gopi as Vrindavati. Vrajanatha has followed the story of the Oriya *Bhagavata* and has accordingly depicted the character whom Krishna abandoned for her ego.

Born in a Vaishnava family as he was, it is natural that Vrajanatha was well-versed in the philosophy of the Vaishnava faith. From the lines 'I bow before my honourable preceptor' and 'I bow before Sri Chaitanya Swami' it is presumed that in the early phase of his life he was initiated into Vaishnavism. In the colophon of this poem the poet has also used 'Dasa' as his surname. This practice was in vogue among the Vaishnavas. Though a Goudiya Vaishnava by faith he held liberal views about religion as well as about different sects. He has described both Niladri (Sree Kshetra or Puri) and Vrindavana with equal reverential attitude, has paid his regards to both Sree Krishna and Jagannatha treating them as identical.[4]

A New Note in Lyric Poems

In those days Oriya poetry was predominantly narrative. Vrajanatha, as we have seen, achieved mastery in writing *kavyas* or long narrative poems following the prevalent tradition. But a versatile poet as he was, he tried his hand successfully in other genres too. In fact, his contribution to Oriya lyric poetry cannot be underestimated. True, many of his lyrical compositions are lost, but those that have come to light are enough to show his genius as a lyric poet. A good many of the lyrics are devotional in nature ; some are poems on love and a few are pitcures of seasons and scenic beauty.

Vrajanatha strikes a new note in Oriya lyric poetry. As we shall see, his lyrics have at least three noteworthy features. They are not conventional, but rich in expression of varied sentiments and moods pertaining to the realities of life. What is more, in them the poet has consciously made a marked deviation from the

4. *Syama Rasotsava*, canto 12, v. 18

conventional poetic language and style by way of drawing upon the spoken language of his time. It is undoubtedly a very bold step long ahead of his age. And finally he has enriched his composition with striking flashes of humour, wit, irony and satire wherein lie his originality and excellence.

In his story collection *Chatura Vinoda,* Vrajanatha has incorporated a few songs out of which four, sung by four different persons - a barber, a brahmin, a physician and an astrologer, are noteworthy being quite robust in realism. Another example of humorous songs found in this book in the section *Preeti Vinoda* is a song on humiliation. The poet in this song has described a few instances of ridiculous situations. The rendering runs thus :

Friendship with a stranger,
The first glow of the rising sun,
The penance of a hungry man,
The words of a greedy land-lord,
To become the pupil of a dunce,
The dance of a man suffering from gout,
The luxury of a miser,
The turban of a man carrying a head-load,
Farming by a man in debt,
Dwelling beside a river in spate,
Reasoning of an addict,
A man earning wealth through corrupt means,
Make up of a widow,
The smile of a lady with protruding teeth,
An old man wooing a young girl,
A hungry boy taking a role in a drama,
The anger of a slave,
To press on the old string of a bow,
The oilman in front of a royal entrance,
The creeper beside the cowshed,
Love purchased with money,
The friendship of a crook,
The nest of a bird by a busy road,
All these that I spoke of, O Manmanua,
Are always subject to ridicule.[5]

5. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, . 242

One of the lyrical compositions of the poet is *Rajananku Chhalokti* (An Ironical Address to the Sovereign). A piece of satire, it was composed when he was on the wrong side of sixty. The poem, as is indicated from the title, is addressed to the king. In this poem he has described his misfortunes and miseries in a humorous way before his patron king.

The canopy held over your majesty's head
Is decked with the sun and the moon
So as I sit in my house over my head are the sun and the moon.[6]

The implication was that his house had no thatch or had a very damaged thatch.

It is difficult to translate the lines of the poem as they abound in puns upon Oriya words. In this autobiographical poem the poet has boldly stated that the king's so-called grant of the land lying arid and wild for ages, 'where tiger cubs are born in front of everybody', is of no use to the poet. Rather, it has put him to many troubles as a result of which the poet is now ready to return it to the estate. The tone of the poem has changed towards the end of it. Here the poet sings of his own distress. This also reveals the heartlessness of his patron whom he has praised in exaggerated terms.

Being a man of ardent faith, the poet has composed a large number of devotional lyrics. In these poems he has sung the glories of Radha, Krishna, Durga and Jagannatha and has offered his earnest prayer before them to redress his personal distress. In one of his poems named *Chandi Malasree*, consisting of eleven stanzas, he has narrated the powers of Chandi who killed Mahishasura, the demon in the shape of a buffalo. In this connection it may be noted that most of the devotional poems written in praise of goddesses in ancient Oriya literature are in a typical metre called Malashree. Hence, Malashree has become a generic term in Oriya specifying a prayer to a goddess.

Of all the gods and goddesses, he was mostly devoted to Lord Jagannatha, the ruling deity of the land and its people. It is evident from the large number of songs in praise of Jagannatha composed by him. His *Gundicha Vije*, a long poem on the car festrival of Lord

6. *Rajananku Chhalokti.*, V. 10

Jagannatha, written in Hindi, highlights his devotion to the Lord. His *Ambika Vilasa*, a long mythological narrative poem, also contains a few short devotional songs.

The poet has composed a few love songs too. In one of these poems the retrospection of a lover separated from his beloved at distant place is described. In this poem consisting of fifty-six quartrains the sweet memories of love and joys of the lover and the beloved during the rains have found expression. Hence, the poet has named this work as *Chhapana Padia,* i.e., poem of fifty-six quartrains.

His two poems, *Gopi Boli* (wrongly printed as *Gopi Vilapa* in *Vrajanatha Granthavali*) and *Dasapoi* are bunches of poems based on the mythological themes of Krishna Leela. The poet has used two different lyrical forms *Boli* and *Poi* in them. Vrajanatha has composed *Gopi Boli* in a simple metre consisting of couplets with eleven letters in each line.

During the medieval period of Oriya literature the poets were generally using Sanskritised and ornamental language in their poetry. To use spoken language in poetry in the period was defintely a novel attempt, nay, a bold experiment.

Vrajanatha was conscious of this and hence in an apologetic way, he has said, 'I have written this work in my spoken language. Please do not blame me saying that I have used rustic language.[7]' In fact, the language of this long poem is simple. In the six cantos of this poem the pangs of separation and the sweet memories of the love sports of Krishna with his six companions named Rasakala, Preetikala, Kamala, Priyavati, Rasavati and Shyamala are described through their monologues. These names of Krishna's companions are imaginary and are not according to the Vaishnava mythology.

The absence of Sri Radha among them, supposed to be the best beloved of Krishna, is significant. Here the love of Krishna for Gopis is not divine. It is the application of all guiles by a clever, cunning and amorous person to entice his lady-loves. Gopis' attraction for the beauty of Krishna and their longing for union with him have been mainly described in these poems. Describing the charming beauty of Krishna one Gopi sings :

My eyes are glued to
Every part of his body I behold.

The poet has admitted that his earlier compositions, as they were written according to the canons of rhetorics, were difficult to be understood and could not gain popularity. Hence, he composed this poem in spoken language.[8] But the poem though written on Krishna Leela fails to depict the nature of selfless love, the complete surrender and absolute devotion valued in Vaishnava Philosophy and reflected in Vaishnava lyrics.

The bunch of poems named *Dasha Poi* consists of ten songs each having ten padas or couplets. As is the convention the poems are written in the *Poi* metre.

The *Poi* begins with the description of spring. Once in this enchanting period, Krishna was enamoured on seeing Radha while she was returning home with pots of water from the Yamuna. He with a passionate longing requested a lady companion of Radha (*dutika*) to make necessary arrangements for his union with her. The dutika accordingly proposed it to Radha and she grew furious to hear such an absurd and unnatural request. The dutika reported the refusal of Radha to Krishna who became extremely dejected. Eventually the dutika advised him to use his magical charm for the purpose and Krishna played on his flute. On hearing the enchanting call of the flute Radha's mind changed. She with her lady friend came to Vrindavana and was united with Krishna. This, in short, is the theme of this bunch of songs written in a simple and colloquial language.

To write poems or lyrics on the realities of life was not in practice in the ancient and medieval periods of Oriya literatre. It was only after contact with English literature during the last part of the 19th century that the Oriya poets started writing such poems. But peculiarly enough poet Vrajanatha, before the inception of British administration and the spread of English education in Orissa, composed a few poems of a realistic nature and gave realistic descriptions of some notable places, persons and situations of his time. Undoubtedly, this testifies to his farsight, progressive attitude and exceptional poetic talent. His *Raja Sabha* (The King's Court) is one such poem in which he has drawn a picture of the court

7. *Gopi Boli* , canto 1, v. 21
8. *Gopi Boli*, canto 6, v. 180-182

life of his patron king Trilochana, the then ruling chief of Dhenkanal. A few details given below bring out the realistic nature of the account given by the poet of the then administration, the penal system of the ruling chiefs, the pomp and grandeur of their courts and the social set-up.

The court sits in the morning. The hall is furnished with costly carpets. Raja Trilochana takes his seat on a *palanka* made of ivory. The *Hukadar* stretches the pipe of the *huka*, decked with gold and filled with scented tobacco. A Brahmin at regular intervals supplies him scented betel (*pan*) for chewing. The time-keeper (*Khuripala*) announces the time. Outside the palace the army consisting of soldiers of Rajput, Pathan, Baghal, Chouhan, Moghul, Chandel, Jath, Rathor, Telengana, Kanouj and Maharastra origin are posted. Different persons from various walks of life such as the gate-keeper, a yogi, the royal astrologer, the physician, the veterinary doctor, the magician, the tantric (*betal*), the acrobats, each of them wielding a bamboo staff, gypsies, sorcerers, musicians, lady dancers, ironsmiths, goldsmiths, the bards and the court poets like Vrajanatha himself arrive one after another bowing down to the king.

Thus, we get the picture of a feudatory court of the medieval period minutely described. An extract from the poem may be cited as a specimen. While giving an account of the musicians the poet writes that the experts in the science of music and the players on different musicial instruments such as Veena, Tambura, Mardal, Stringed Mandira, Flute, Khanjani and the musical instruments brought from Telengana (Telengi Baja), holding their respective instruments, are reporting themselves with due respect in an orderly fashion before the king.[9] In this context the poet gives a detailed account of a dance, the different types of Ragas, Talas, Ukuta, Mana and Layas and the Mudras of the hands and fingers as demonstrated while the dancing is actually performed there. Towards the end of the poem the poet says that he meets the Raja and sings about his indebtedness to the ancestors of the Raja, his own poetic creations and other artistic abilities. He prays for his grace and appeals for aid to enable him to continue his artistic and literary pursuits. The Raja is pleased to issue orders for the grant of

9. *Raja Sabha*, 32nd stanza

an allowance for his maintenance and pays in cash a sum of rupees one hundred immediately.

This small poem was written in 1791 when the poet was sixty-one. But to his misfortune Raja Trilochana died the next year. The poet could not get the same treatment and encouragement from his successors. Therefore, he left Dhenkanal for Puri with a view to spending his last days there.

The poet was an adept in composing poems known as Chautisa, a popular and significant form of lyrics in ancient and medieval Oriya language. A chautisa consists of thirty-four stanzas corresponding to the alphabetical order of the thirty-four Oriya consonants. Almost all the poets of the ancient and medieval Oriya literatures tried their hands in composing chautisas. But no other chautisa of the poet save *Jaladhara Chautisa* has yet come to light. The authorship of this chautisa has been attributed by the poet to Valabhadra Bhanja, the Ruling Chief of Keonjhar, under whose patronage the poet lived for sometime. This chautisa established his excellence in the use of an *alankara* (figure of speech) called *Shrunkhala*. From the beginning till the end of the poem words have been used in a chained fashion, i.e., the last word of a particular line is used as the first word of the subsequent line. In this way the entire chautisa is composed in Kamodi Raga (metre). Needless to say that it is a difficult art. In the whole domain of Oriya chautisa literature, such a type of chautisa is rare.

The theme of the poem is simple. The lover during the rains speaks of his pangs of separation before the cloud and requests him to go with a letter to his beloved as a messenger. He for the consolation of his beloved has also requested the cloud not to make any loud and terrifying sound nor shed showers in torrents. It is certain that the poet got the inspiration from the Sanskrit work *Meghaduta* of Kalidas to compose this poem.

A few words may be said about the description of nature in the poetry of Vrajanatha. In ancient and medieaval Oriya literature, nature has been presented mainly as a background to the emotions of the characters. The poets have not cared very much to portray the diverse elements and peculiarities of natural phenomena of a particular region. It is only in the works of Radhanath Roy (1848 - 1908) that the natural beauty of the different regions of Orissa has

been painted in concrete details and his *Chilika* is, therefore, rightly considered a unique creation which opened new vistas in the field of modern Oriya poetry. But Vrajanatha, about a century before Radhanath, wrote poems depicting different aspects of various places of Orissa. This proves his originality and his love for his native land.

At the end of his long poem *Ambika Vilasa*, he has added one canto in which he has described his native place Dhenkanal and the Kapilas Hill. Since this description has no relevance to the main text of the poem, the poet has deliberately composed this portion, consisting of twelve small poems, in a separate poetical pattern known as *Poi*. The following lines from this *Poi* are given as a specimen of the realistic description of Kapilas.

This is the sacred land renowned for ages in the world.
The stream with purling sound flows from the mountain
The health-giving cool clear water of which pleases
Lord Siva dwelling there
Sinners easily attain virtue by drinking the water and
bathing in the spring. [10]

Similarly, the Keonjhar version of his *Ambika Vilasa* depicts the natural beauty of Keonjhar and the hill Gonasika, a place of scenic beauty and religious interest.

Major works :

Ambika Vilasa

This poem is considered to be the masterpiece of Vrajanatha. In fact as a poem on a Shaivite subjectmatter it is by far the best work in Oriya literature. The poem, fairly a big one consisting of forty-one cantos, is composed according to the 'Akshara Niyama' of ' a' the first letter of the Oriya alphabet, i.e., every line begins with ' अ ' . The poem begins with a prayer to Shiva and his consort Shiva (Parvati). Each line of the first eight couplets of Canto I gives two-fold meanings being at the same time the praise of both Shiva and Parvati. Thereafter, the poet in the different cantos of the poem

10. *Ambika Vilasa*, canto 24, song in poem 2

has described the mythological episodes systematically : Shiva's marriage with Sati, the daughter of Daksha Prajapati; Sati committing suicide by jumping into the sacrificial fire; Shiva's destruction of the *yajna* of Daksha Prajapati and the latter's death at the hand of Shiva; rebirth of Sati as Uma, the daughter of the Himalayas and her austere penance for union with Shiva; break of Shiva's penance by Madana leading to the latter's destruction; the intense agony of Rati, wife of Madana; Shiva's love for Parvati and their marriage; birth of Kumara and the killing of Tarakasura.

In each canto the poet in order to show his artistic skill and scholarship has used a distinctive type of metre and alankaras other than those used in other cantos. Two metres used by the poet in the 11th and the 12th cantos are his original inventions. The poem also reveals his acquaintance with different languages as he has incorporated hymns of prayer to Lord Shiva composed in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindi and Bengali. The poet was fully conscious of his intent and purpose as is manifest in the 39th canto. In this canto he has given a short account of his work and has rightly compared it with a house made of gold. Hence, this canto though it comes towards the last of the poem may be regarded as a sort of introduction to the poem.

The relation of the last two cantos to the main theme of the poem is rather loose. In the 40th canto the poet has elaborately described the duties of a ruling chief; and in the subsequent one he has given a few details regarding the Raja of Keonjhar in one version and the Raja of Dhenkanal, his original patron, in another along with their respective personal qualities and virtues. Thus, two different versions of these two last cantos are available. This has created a controversy : while in one version the poet has mentioned the name and the qualities of the Ruling Chief of Keonjhar and has described a few scenes of the hill Gonasika and other beautiful places of this estate, in the other the name of the Ruler of Dhenkanal is given and his virtues as well as the places of interest in Dhenkanal are described. A reference to the poet's itinerary makes it clear that the poet, while he was at Keonjhar in order to please its ruler, might have presented the book to him and again when he returned to his native state he probably presented the same work in a slightly modified form to his patron, the Raja of Dhenkanal.

Each canto of this poem shows the poet's extraordinary descriptive talent. The ceremonial *yajna* of Daksha and the Brahmins who had assembled there to participate in the function, Kashi Nagar (Banaras), the seat of Lord Shiva, the beautiful regions of the Himalayas, the marriage procession of Lord Shiva, and above all the splendid royal feast and the arrangement made by King Himavant for the entertainment of the bridegroom's party in which the typical Orissan food preparations were served, etc., have been exquisitely and graphically described. The poet, a true realist, is much ahead of his time and the examples of realism are strikingly remarkable. The accounts given of Parvati's dressing up with garments and ornaments for the occasion of her honeymoon, her dishevelled appearance when she returned from the 'Kali Mandira' in the morning after her union with Shiva, the presentation of horses of Turaska, Iraq and Cutch origin as well as finely woven shawls which could be packed inside small rings, sports articles like the Chess Board, etc., as dowry to the Divine Couple, and later of the elaborate birthday celebrations of Kumara, etc., bear testimony to the poet's love of realism then not admissible in the treatment of a religious theme. In fact, it has been rightly said that "this *kavya* is on the whole so unconventional and so different from other *kavyas* in Oriya in its protrayal of the actual realities of social life that its author must have been some one quite original and unorthodox ".[11]

The poet has also mentioned that after the completion of the poem he invited the pundits (scholars) and himself read it to them. The pundits after due consideration were satisfied and proclaimed the work as faultless.

It is presumed that *Ambika Vilasa* was composed between 1770-1780 A.D. [12]

Chatura Vinoda

This piece of work is considered to be one of the outstanding literary creations of medieval Orissa. The subjectmatter and the technique employed in expounding it are both rather singular. According to the Sanskrit terminology of the *Alankara Sastra*, this story collection in prose can be classified as a *Gadya Kavya*, i.e., a

11 Dr. M. Mansingh, *History of Oriya literature*, p. 158

12. Introduction to *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, p. 12

work in poetic prose or rather as *Katha Kavya*. Inspired by the Sanskrit fictional writings such as *Hitopadesha, Panchatantra* and *Kadambari* and the rich heritage of Oriya folk lore, the poet set out to write the stories in Oriya.

During the time of Vrajanatha there was a class of people in Orissa whose profession was to tell imaginary tales for the entertainment of the people. They were also getting the patronage of the local chiefs, their courtiers and the landlords. It is quite probable that the poet, with the intention of entertaining the king and his people, tried his hand in this *genre*. However, it can safely be said that writing prose in an artistic style in that age dominated by poetry and metrical compositions, was a novel attempt.

This story collection as its name denotes consists of four parts namely *Hasya Vinoda, Rasa Vinoda, Neeti Vinoda* and *Preeti Vinoda* ('Chatura' means four and 'Vinoda' means entertainment or delight). In the beginning of each part or section, the author has given a *sloka* in Sanskrit composed by him pertaining to that particular section. These *slokas* signify the importance of humour, sentiment, moral law and love. The book begins with a prayer to Ganesha and Lord Krishna.

In order to give unity to the bundle of stories the poet has created the frame of an imaginary situation. A prince named Mohananga on his way to a temple saw a beautiful lady named Chanchalakshi. The daughter of a merchant named Netramoda, she was returning home after her morning bath in the river. The prince expressed before her the deep love that was generated in him at the first sight and wished to have her company. The lady had no alternative and with much hesitation she agreed. Accordingly, Mohananga arrived at the residence of Chanchalakshi at the appointed hour in the evening. The lady then disclosed that the night was not favourable for their union since she was observing *Gourivrata*, a vow, and would spend the night without sleep. Mohananga agreed to wait till the next night for their union and also wanted to spend the night all awake with her. At the request of the lady's companion, Mohananga told four long stories to cover the entire night consisting of four quarters.

A few more stories have also been incorporated in the text by way of illustrations in the four main stories. Apart from the introductory tale, the book in its different parts contains seventeen

stories. The first story *Hasya Vinoda* describes the marriage of the maiden Vilapamukhi with Marjaramukha and the queer condition of a so-called princely state along with the monologues of four persons, a brahmin, a physician, an astrologer and a barber. The story element in this story is negligible. The descriptions are of exaggerated nature and the humour is of a very low type and speaks of a crude rustic taste and loose morals.

Rasa Vinoda, the second part of *Chatura Vinoda*, begins with the story of Hemangi, the beautiful daughter of a brahmin and Tarunakanta, the son of the minister. Love at the first sight made them ill both physically and emotionally. The nature of their illness was rightly diagnosed by the physician Rasapura, who was employed to treat them separately. He devised a plan and utilised the service of a nomadic woman (*keluni*) named Harshamati. Through his clever device Hemangi and Tarunakanta were united and their so-called ailment was cured. Rasapura while treating Tarunakanta narrated the story of a lady named Narmada and the mouse as an illustration befitting the situation. Similarly, Malati, a brahmin lady, narrated the story of a lame door-keeper (guard). The lame guard also narrated the story of Manjari and Giridhari Dutta. Thus, this part of the book contains four stories.

Neeti Vinoda, the third part of the book, also has four stories. The plot of the story centres round the marriage of Kundarekha, the daughter of Kusalakarma. Kundarekha, as a mark of her gratitude, had promised to marry a brahmin youth named Pundarika Panda who had saved her from a well into which she had accidentally fallen. Her father when he was ill at a far off place, as a mark of gratitude, had promised to give his daughter in marriage to a brahmin youth named Gopakadamba but for whose help he could not have survived. Kundarekha's mother also promised to give her daughter in marriage to a young brahmin named Chakrarasi who had helped her family when her husband was absent for a long period. However, this problem when presented before the king was happily solved. Vrajanatha in his own individual style has related the story thus :

In the east there was a kingdom named Kirti Mandana. The name of the king was Chandraloka. The king was unique and next to none for his virtues, noble actions, honesty, sense of justice,

heroism, and traditional high qualities of his family. The splendid illustrations of his virtues were beautifully manifest everywhere. He looked after his subjects as if they were his own sons. In his kingdom there lived a brahmin, Kusalakarma by name. His family consisted of four members, his wife, a son and a daughter. As the brahmin was a learned scholar well-versed in all the *Vedas*, Amaratilaka, the king of the country named Vichitratunga, invited him to recite the *Vedas*. He lived with the king for a long time engaged in reciting *Sama Veda*. While he was away, his daughter Kundarekha once went to the well situated at the end of the town with a pitcher in hand to fetch water. She tied a rope to the pitcher and dropped it in but no sooner had she drawn the pitcher up than her legs slipped and she fell into the well. A brahmin, Pundarika Panda by name, was performing his evening prayers beside that very well. When he saw Kundarekha falling into the well, he rushed forward leaving his prayers. As he looked into the well, he saw the girl about to be drowned in the water. All at once the brahmin jumped into the well and held the girl up. With much difficulty he raised her from the well. Kundarekha now properly covered her body and holding the feet of the brahmin said, "You have saved my life. How can I repay the debt ? Today I accept you as my husband. I will pay off your debt by serving you as your devoted wife. I take the vow that I won't marry any other man except you. May death come to me if I fail to keep my word".

Hearing this the brahmin said —" O girl ! why do you take such a vow ? Your parents are your guardians. You should accept the man they would select as your husband; for, the Sanskrit verse runs thus :

> A woman has no independent existence : as long as she is a virgin, she is protected by her father, in youth by her husband, and in old age by her son.

Hearing the *sloka*, Kundarekha said, "If my father offers me as a bride to anyone but you, I would sacrifice my life. This is my vow."

"Are there any witnesses to your vow ?" the brahmin asked.

"Yes," replied the girl, "they are the sun, the moon and the sentinels of the eight directions."

A pair of parrots perching on the banyan tree beside the well were hearing this tale of hers. When they uttered a sweet sound, Kundarekha said, "O Parrots! I have accepted this brahmin as my husband and I shall not accept anyone else. Please be witness to my vow." After this solemn promise Kundarekha and Pundarika Panda returned to their respective homes.

Now, the brahmin Kusalakarma suffered a lot in the kingdom of Vichitratunga. He was completely laid up with pneumonia. A brahmin Gopakadamba by name took him to his own house and nursed him well. He nursed him for three months. When Kusalakarma recovered, he promised to give his daughter Kundarekha in marriage to that brahmin. Hearing his sincere promise, the brahmin became confident about his marriage with Kundarekha.

Meanwhile, Kusalakarma's return being unusually delayed, his wife Satyakama with her son and daughter had to face a lot of difficulties. The food ran short and she could not get any information about her husband from anybody. The kingdom of Vichitratunga was far off. Whom could she send to such a distant country ? Because of the great suffering, the poor lady borrowed money from a brahmin named Chakrarasi making a promise in the presence of some elderly brahmins that she would in return give him her daughter Kundarekha in marriage. Thus being sure of his marriage with Kundarekha, Chakrarasi busied himself in making preparations for the ceremony.

As that year the combination of the constellations Leo and Jupiter in the following months was inauspicious for marriage, Kusalakarma returned to her own home bringing Gopakadamba with him to give away his daughter to him in marriage in due time. Knowing the approaching period to be inauspicious Chakrarasi too started collecting materials for his marriage. At the same time bearing in mind the girl's promise Pundarika also made ornaments for her. When Kusalakarma went to temple with Gopakadamba and prepared to perform the marriage, Chakrarasi reached there with his brahmin witnesses and asked Kusalakarma in the name of the king not to give his daughter in marriage to Gopakadamba. Thus there arose a conflict between the two brahmin suitors. Both the grooms went to King Chandraloka to lodge their complaints.

Hearing the claims of both the plaintiffs the king thought, "Both of these youngmen are right. Whom are we to give the girl ? " So he convened a council of brahmins whom he addressed thus : "Oh, respected brahmins ! We know that a place polluted with filth is purified by pouring holy water on it. Hence, who else except the brahmins can dispense justice in a conflict between two brahmins ? So, you decide and tell me to whom the girl should be given in marriage." At the king's behest came the brahmins with various surnames—Nanda, Misra, Mohapatra, Kar, Rath, Acharya, Sharangi, Bhatta, Dwivedi, Tripathy, Pani, Satapathy, Pati, Chakravarti, Dash, Dixit, Muni, Devata, Vyas, Chaini, Panda, Patri. The king too invited Rajaguru, Bramha, Patjoshi, Praharaj, Paramguru, Purohit, Vadapanda, Sadis, Khadanga, Bhatta Misra, Vajapei, Agnihotri, Samantaraya, Vahinipati, the brahmins of special distinction of the court to be present there to accompany them. The brahmins reached the village of Kusalakarma. The plaintiff brahmins made arrangements for them to sit under the banyan tree near the well into which Kundarekha had fallen.

The brahmins called the two rival brahmin grooms and enquired about their respective claims to marriage. At this moment Pundarika Panda appeared before them and said, "O respected brahmins ! You have come to make the right decision but I am sure, I should get the girl, for it is my moral right. Before giving your verdict you may consider my claim." Hearing this all were surprised and asked, " What sort of right is yours ? Let us hear the story which justifies your right."

Pundarika continued : ' What should I say! The sun, the moon and the sentinels of the eight directions are witnesses to my claim. Rather they should tell." At this time the parrots on the tree producing sweet sounds started laughing loudly. Hearing it the brahmins asked, "O parrots ! why do you laugh ? Please let us know." The parrots said – "O learned brahmin ! The wisdom, the wealth and the wife one gets are pre-determined. Hence, the girl must go to one to whom she is pre-ordained to go. You first hear a story that we tell."

Then (concluding their story) the parrots said, "So Kundarekha should get Pundarika Panda as her husband. You may listen to Pundarika Panda, as to what right he has to mary the girl."

Hearing this the brahmins asked, " O Pundarika ! tell us why you claim this girl."

He said, "The parrots have seen and heard everything about my claim. You should better hear from them."

The brahmins said, "O parrots ! tell us what you know about this incident."

Hearing this the parrots narrated everything, starting from how Kundarekha fell into well up to how at last she accepted Pundarika as her husband.

Hearing the story the brahmins said that it was like the story of Vimba. Pundarika had risked his own life to save Kundarekha. Kundarekha had accepted him in the name of Dharma. Again, she had taken the vow that if she would touch another man, her heart would burst. Svayamvara is the best type of marriage in all ages. By sheer chance it had become a svayamvara. This was why Pundarika should win the palm of Kundarekha.

Preeti Vinoda consists of seven stories. They are comparatively short and are told as examples of different types of love—some beneficial and some harmful to men, the types being treacherous love, wicked love, mean love, spontaneous love, selfish love and dangerously treacherous love, etc.

The characters of these stories, instead of being princes and princesses, belong to different strata of society. The stories also reflect the author's sense of humour and morality. During the time of Vrajanatha the love of princes and princesses was the main theme of literature. But he did not like the beaten track and wrote stories based on the lines of persons of diverse strata such as the brahmin, the barber, the tradesman, the merchant, the cowherd, the sepoy, the dancer, the physician, the goldsmith, the astrologer, the cook, the *sabara* (an aborigine) and of ladies like the daughters of a tradesman, a goldsmith and a brahmin, and also of a flower maid, a gypsy woman, a maid servant, etc.

The stories are written mostly in simple and spoken language, but at places, the author, to make the language appear poetic and artistic, has used alliteration and other figures of speech. The use of alliteration and rhyming of words has turned his prose poetic and has added a special beauty and charm to his prose style. Besides, he has interspersed the stories with poems, adages *(Dhaga)*, satirical

songs (*Dhamali*) and witty sayings (*Pahali*) in order to make his stories pleasant to read.

The humorous and at the sametime amorous nature of the stories has led some critics to opine that the poet while young in order to entertain the perverted people of the court with jokes may have written the stories and thus wasted his talents. But such a presumption is incorrect. It is true that the first part of the book is full of amorous incidents and nauseating descriptions and eleven out of the seventeen stories in the book deal with love. But taking the book as a whole it is certain that the stories contain also a variety of material for the pleasure and profit of all types of peopole. The stories also echo the author's rich experiences regarding human nature and behaviour, social customs and moral values. They are born out of his mature experience and must have been written in his advanced years.

In these stories, as in fables, we have non-human characters such as the parrot, the swan, the crane, the cow, etc. It is true that we do not find impressive individual characters and complex personalities in them. Instead we come across type characters like seducers, betrayers, braggarts, immoral thieves, and sensual men indulging in illicit relationship with others. Such simplicity of characterization was largely due to the age in which the author wrote. His literary mode was comical, or satirical. The picture which emerges from his writings was no doubt that of a corrupt and morally degraded society. The characters painted in these stories mainly suffer from carnal desire and unbridled sexual appetite and we do not find noble passions or ideal emotions of love portrayed in them.

In fact, during this period most of the ruling chiefs of the feudatory states of Orissa were despots. The subjects, ill-fated as they were, had no courage to raise their voice against the injustice or oppression of their rulers. The decisions of these chiefs were final and binding. The main source of entertainment of these rulers was hunting of wild animals in jungles and amorous pursnit of women. The courtiers, the employees of these rulers and the people belonging to the upper class of the society followed in the foot-prints of their masters. Vrajanatha has rightly and courageously painted this perverted society with its loose morals. Thus he has drawn a realistic picture of the society.

Chatura Vinoda is the lone example of story writing in Oriya. The stories echo the voice of social consciousness for the first time in Oriya literature. It is the first conscious effort of an original writer to create a work of humour and satire in Oriya. The stories combine in them simultaneously the elements of folk tale, fable, allegory, fantasy and reaslistic narrative. The author in these stories is keenly interested in the delineation of characters. They are rich in descriptions, equally vivid and minute. *Chatura Vinoda* is a criticism of life; it unfolds a comic and satirical vision of the feudal society in the eighteenth century Orissa.

Samara Taranga

The poem in respect of its theme is a unique composition in the whole range of ancient and medieval Oriya literature. Unlike the romantic and mythological poems of the period, it deals with a true historical episode—the war between the Marhatta forces and the ruler of Dhenkanal, an event of significance which took place in 1780-81, during the Marhatta rule in Orissa. The poet was an eye-witness and had first hand knowledge about the conflict. Hence, this poem gives a vivid and lively account of warfare in the medieval period of Orissan history.

As the poet was attached to the court, he composed the poem with the hope of getting some reward from the Raja. In fact the poem glorifies the activities of the Raja. According to the poet, he presented it to the king when he was in his lake resort at Hadagarh and recited it at his request. For this he was favoured with the hereditary grant of a village named Nuagan, a recurring cash grant of Rs. 500/- per annum till his death and an immediate non-recurring grant of Rs. 200/- along with a silk scarf. Thus, the internal evidence establishes that the poem was definitely composed in 1781.

The poem begins with an invocation of the blessing of Lord Jagannatha, his brother Valabhadra and sister Subhadra. The available text of *Samara Taranga* has seven cantos. But as a matter of fact the poet in five cantos had completed his work. Subsequently, he added two more cantos to the original text which have little relevance to the main theme.

In the first canto the poet gives an account of the dissension between the Marhatta Governor Rajaram Pandit and Raja

Trilochana of Dhenkanal. The forces of the former who had planned to lay seize to the fort of Dhenkanal received a crushing defeat on their way at Motari at the hands of the soldiers of Dhenkanal as a result of which they fled to Cuttack leaving behind their war materials and rations. Rajaram sent this message to the Marhatta Emperor Mudhoji Bhonsla of Nagpur and pleaded for help. Accidentally, a section of the Marhatta cavalary while proceeding to Calcutta under Chimnajee Bapu, was deputed to Cuttack to subdue the unruly chieftain of Orissa. It was the period of hot summer. The Marhatta forces sent to Dhenkanal during their campaign were forced to camp at a place on the way for 12 days. There were practically no roads and most part of the country was full of dense forests and hills. The soldiers could not bear the heat ; they suffered from dysentery and cholera. They were forced to return to Cuttack to rest till the summer and the rainy seasons were over and the time became favourable for an attack.

The second canto describes in a vivid manner the preparations for war by both the parties at two different places. At Cuttack under the leadership of Chimnajee Bapu the Marhatta forces along with their colourful cavalry, elephants and infantry marched with pomp and grandeur. Raja Trilochana also fortified his fort and inspired his soldiers to defend the fort at any cost.

The third canto paints elaborately the scene of the battlefield and the two parties in action. The strategy of the Marhatta forces to attack the fort from the back was foiled by the wise decision of Raja Trilochana. The defensive measures taken by him and his inspiring words encouraged the soldiers. On one front they ultimately succeeded in causing heavy casualties among the Marhatta forces. Most of the soldiers were wounded and many fled for life from the field of battle. On the other front the Marhatta forces used their canons and guns against the fort wall. But most of their firings proved ineffective. They falied to perpetrate any heavy damage on the fort. On the other hand the soliders of Dhenkanal caused heavy damage to the Marhatta army. Many soldiers died and many were wounded. Their plight was miserable. Completely demoralised, they cursed their Sardars and their ill-luck.

The fourth canto elaborately describes the plight of the Marhatta soldiers and their despair during the period of attack which continued for eighteen days. Finally, Chimnajee, the leader

of the Marhatta forces, got angry and rebuked the Sardars for their failure in offensive operations. Deliberation began in the Marhatta camp regarding the line of action to be taken by them. Bhawani Kale, the minister and one of the leaders of the Marhatta army, visualised the gloomy future of their troops. In order to check further depletion of their army he advised to send a peace proposal to Raja Trilochana as dislodging him from the fort seemed impossible. His advice was accepted and the proposal was sent accordingly. One of the terms, however, was that Raja Trilochana would vacate the fort for a day or two as a mark of respect to the Marhatta chief so that his prestige would not be affected. The Marhatta Sardar agreed to reduce the amount of *Peskis* (revenue) to be paid by Raja Trilochana to the Marhatta.

The fifth canto gives in detail the deliberations on the peace proposal which took place among the courtiers and officers of Raja Trilochana. On account of constant fighting his Paikas and Sardars had also become tired and were in favour of accepting the terms of the peace proposal. But Raja Trilochana suspecting the intention of the Marhattas, whom he considered as treacherous, was not willing to vacate the fort. He was confident of his victory as he had enough of ammunitions and rations at his disposal. He was apprehending that the Marhattas might violate their promise and might not quit the fort once they were allowed to enter inside and might demand the full payment of their dues (*Peskis*).

On the other hand, the courtiers argued that the Marhattas would not dare to do so, since they had realised the military strength of Dhenkanal and its soldiers. In case the Marhattas refused to leave the fort they would be properly dealt with. Raja Trilochana at last agreed and accordingly vacated the fort for a day. The Marhatta forces considered this as their victory and left Dhenkanal forthwith.

It has been rightly said that the manly, stirring address (which might be pure imagination) of the Raja to his courtiers who advised him to make a retreat from his fort, is worthy to be treasured in any literature: "You all, without an exception, have opted for a retreat. But I am determined to stay on. Let anybody come and dislodge me from here. Let the man bearing arms go and plough fields if he is afraid of death. The beauty of a soldier's life lies in his death on the battlefield. Fame alone survives after death and nobody cares to mention a coward except with contempt. Isn't it great fun that we

have already pushed back such a big army ? Even Indra's fortune cannot be greater than our armed alertness by day and by night ! This you want to forgo and counsel a retreat ? Oh, the happy memories after the battle is over ! Memories of the accurate aiming of guns and spears from behind these ramparts against the enemy, and the rush of soldiers unto death like *Satis* ! And if they return not home, do they not share seats of glory in Heaven with the king of gods ! The hero that dies with his hand still wielding his weapon is beyond compare. He is lucky indeed whose body is torn with wounds on the battle-ground. The coward is merely a girl in spite of his male form. He whose heart palpitates at the sight of blood is contemptible, no matter if he be covered with jewels or possesses wealth untold. Don't talk of leaving the fort. With sword and shield let us, with God in our hearts, rush into the flanks of the enemy, unconcerned about consequences. Arguments apart, who advises us to compromise with nuisance of these Bargis ?"[13]

As has been stated before, the poet in the sixth canto, in order to record the valour of his mentor, Raja Trilochana, had described a clash with the ruler of the neighbouring estate Keonjhar. The Raja of Keonjhar had supplied men and materials to the Marhattas while they were engaged in warfare with Raja Trilochana. Besides, the border areas of Dhenkanal had also been looted and plundered by his people. The forces of Keonjhar had intruded into the territories of Dhenkanal. Informed about it Raja Trilochana sent a few horsemen under the command of his Palace Superintendent (*Vevarta*) who easily subdued them. A few soldiers of Keonjhar died and others fled for life.

In the seventh canto the poet is eloquent in praising Raja Trilochana. He enumerates his virtues, his benevolence, prowess and bravery as well as his cruel attitude towards his enemy. He also gives an account of his own self towards the end of the canto. From this it is learnt that by the time this poem was composed his virtuous elder brother had died and his younger brother Jagannatha was in the service of Raja Trilochana who conferred upon him the title of "Kavibhushana Pattanaik'; the youngest Lokanatha was a poet and a devoted soul and had won the title of *Routray*. Vrajanatha himself was renowned for his excellence in fine arts, paintings, handicrafts

13. Dr. M. Mansingh, *History of Oriya Literture*, p. 160-61

and in writing poetry. He was also visiting the courts of the other princely states. In this connection, the poet has stated his reactions about these rulers most of whom were not qualified enough to be able to appreciate his work of art. Finally, invoking the blessings of Lord Krishna the poet has concluded his poem.

In this work the poet has mentioned the names of the weapons used and the musical instruments played on during the warfare. The weapons are locally called as *Kunta, Gupti, Farsha, Tangi, Katari, Chakra, Banku, Chhora, Badi Vandhuk, Bhdla, Ballam, Burchha,Chadakanali, Talvar, Pata* (gauntlet), *Dhup* (one-edged sword), *Khadga* (double edged sword), *Jajal* and *Ginjal* (types of small cannons) *Badau* (shield with a piercing appendage), *Dhala* (shield), *Dhankuna* (A kind of spear). The musical instruments used in connection with war were *Dampa Nagara, Nagara* (a kind of drum), *Mahuri, Nisan* or *Dhamsa* (type of drum carried and played on elephants' back), *Ghasa, Dhol and Swara.* The illustrations are to be found in *Vrajanatha Granthavali* published by Sahitya Akademi, Orissa, p. 497-498.

It is a poem of which there are no parallels in recent or contemporary Oriya poetry. Inspiring in nature, it is both heroic in spirit and patriotic in import. The type is at once a culmination of the medieval ballads and bardic poetry on war themes — a counterpart of the heroic poems on Rajput valour and a forerunner of those on patriotic themes in later years.

Gundicha Vije—a poem in Hindi

It has been mentioned earlier about the author's proficiency in Hindi language, as he has declared in his writings, the evidence of which to a certain extent is available from his work *Samara Taranga.* In this work, the poet at places for the sake of realistic description has introduced Hindi language through the mouth of the Marhattas. But *Gundicha Vije* written in Hindi speaks of his mastery over the language. The subjectmatter of this poem is the description of the car festival of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. The purpose of writing the poem in Hindi is a matter of curiosity. Was it meant for the publicity of the name and fame of Lord Jagannatha among the Hindi speaking people ? In that age the poets with the hope of receiving the approbation of the local kings were endeavouring to show their scholarship through their works. This

poem might have been a product of such an aspiration of the poet. Writing a poem in Hindi, the language of the ruling class, might have been a matter of pride for the author.

However, the work indeed is a novel attempt. He has written this poem in *Khoratha Boli* or Khoratha language. The poet probably has taken Khadiboli, which has similarity with the Marahatti language, as the Khoratha language. It is known that Khortha is a dialect spoken by a section of the people of Bihar.[14] This Khoratha language might have been considered by the poet as Hindi language in general. We find the influence of Vrajabhasha at different places in the poem. The poet has also skilfully inserted many Oriya words, but the use of Perso-Arabic (*Yavaṇika*) words is rare. The poem has not been composed in a single metre. The poet has used different types of metres of Hindi such as *Doha, Sabaiya, Kabitta, Chhappaya, Chaupai,* etc.

As has been discussed earlier the Oriya *Chhandas* (metres) are based on the uniform number of letters, not of syllables. It is, therefore, definitely difficult on the part of an Oriya poet to compose a poem in Hindi metres. However, the poet has shown his success in handling the Hindi metres. Presumably, the poet had gone through the famous work *Rama Charita Manasa* of Tulasi Das. According to critics in this work the metres such as *Doha, Chaupai,* and *Soratha* have achieved their perfection. A few illustrations from *Gundicha Vije* may be cited here.

Doha — 24 matras (13+11)
Nandi Ghosa ratha uparako
Chalata hai nabaghana shyama
Mano Vijaye Viman se
Sohata nava chhavi kama.
Rath Taladhwajpar Vaithata yo
Pravala teja halahatha
Udayachalake Mathame
Vijoy kina jaganmata.

Choupai
Aota Sadhu yo Madhava Bhola
Pulakita anga palaka nahin dala

14. G. Praharaj, *Purna Chandra Oriya Bhasa Kosha*

4

Hasata rodata lajabhi chhoda
Nachata kava kava chaitana hara.

Kabitta

Khinchata kati pata dora
Jora Karake Phera Phera
Toli Dharata de ke sora
Gola Vipula baha
Jaja lalakara mara
Thelata koi barabara
Dhira Dhira jhuli chalata
Yaise hathi haha.

The car festival of Lord Jagannatha is world famous. On the forenoon of the second day of Ashadha (July) the four idols, Jagannatha, Valabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana are brought ceremoniously from inside the temple and are placed on three well-decorated wooden chariots. Then the three chariots are drawn by the people assembled to Gundicha Mandira, a temple situated at a distance of 4 kms. The idols stay there for seven days and are duly worshipped. On the ninth day they are brought back on the chariots to the original temple, the temple of Jagannatha. In this festival Laxmi, Lord Jagannatha's spouse, does not accompany him. So she is annoyed ; she closes the doors of the main temple and does not allow the two brothers and their sister to enter. At this point, exchange of angry words in the form of verses takes place between Lord Jagannatha and Laxmi, each deity represented by a section of its priests. Jagannatha admits his fault. After his song to pacify Laxmi is sung, the door of the main temple is let open for his entrance. Subsequently, Jagannatha and Laxmi are united.

This festival has inspired poet Vrajanatha to compose the poem in Hindi. This festival has also inspired a few other poets of Orissa to compose poems both in Oriya and Sanskrit. It may not be out of place to mention that poet Chakrapani Pattanaik, a contemporary of Vrajanatha, composed a *champu* named *Gundicha Champu* on the same theme in 1778. But it can safely be said that *Gundicha Vije* is by far the best and one of the most outstanding works written on this festival. It presents a vivid picture of the car festival of Lord Jagannatha in the 18th century. From the colophon of this poem we learn that the poet himself recited this poem before King Divya

Singha Dev (1793-98), the then king of Puri. Hence, it is certain that this poem was composed between 1792 and 1798.

Here the poet has systematically and minutely described different aspects of the festival from the beginning till the end. The poet has elaborately described the *Pahandi* (step by step advance) of the deities from the temple to the chariots, the three beautiful and decorated chariots, the enthusiasm and joy with which the idols are brought to the chariots, ceremonial cleansing of the platform of the chariots by the Gajapati of Puri, the movement of the chariot along the grand road in the midst of oceanlike crowds of people belonging to different parts of India and abroad. As an eye witness, the poet has mentioned the names of the places from which the visitors and devotees had come. They were from Anga (Bihar), Vanga (Bengal), Varanasi, Kashmir, Kalinga, Nepal, Panchala, Multan, Lahore, Radha, Rohilakhand, Vilat (England), Viabat (Mewat, the place between Rajasthan and Sindh), Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, Rairangapur, Nandi, Nilagiri, Gopa, Mathura, Karnataka, Kosala, Kanchi, Gujrat, Delhi, Malwa, Cutch and so on.[15]

His description of the great assembly of people is both objective and realistic. During this festival of the presiding deity Lord Jagannatha, all people, irrespective of rank and status, caste and creed, become equal and pull the ropes of the chariots. They forget their position, power and prestige. But the poet, conscious of the differences in the ways and attitudes of men and their weaknesses has described the different reactions of the people according to their *satwika, rajasika* and *tamasika* nature and taste.

Here is chanted 'Hara' 'Hara'
There the songs of pleasure ;
Here they recite the Vedas,
There goes on love making.
Here is the song of devotion,
The devotees lost in ecstasy,
There the deeds of deceit and greed, lust and lechery.
Here are the sprightly amorous women
And men of lust united in desire
There the wenches of loose morals
Keen on wresting away the wealth of lusty lovers.[16]

15. *Gundicha Vije*, v. 32-34

16. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, p. 668

Now-a-days the chariots pulled from the main temple of Jagannatha reach Gundicha Mandira on the same day. But in those days it was not possible. There were many disadvantages. The poet has described that soon after the onset of evening, chariots halt on the way. The next morning the pulling of the chariots begins again and soon after they reach the destination.

The period of the festival is also associated with rains as it is held in Ashadha corresponding to the months of June and July. The poet has described the rainy season and its effect on Lord Jagannatha. During the rains the separation of the lover and the beloved makes their condition miserable. Lord Jagannatha too, on account of the absence of Laxmi, suffers from the pangs of separation like human beings. He is eager to return to his permanent abode, his main temple where Laxmi is all alone.

The next phase of the festival, the dialogue in songs between Jagannatha and Laxmi and their reunion, has been described by the poet in a lively and romantic manner. In delineating this the poet has followed the tradition of the Reeti *kavyas* as is revealed through the sham anger of Laxmi due to her love for her beloved Lord Jagannatha and the latter's hyperbolic expressions of praise of the beloved aimed at pacifying her angry mood. We find that Laxmi during the absence of Jagannatha has become weak and irritable. Lord Jagannatha too feels sorry for the pain he has caused to her. In order to please Laxmi he has flattered her in exaggerated terms. The poem has been concluded thus :

The charming eyed (Laxmi) abandoned her distress
At the humble words of love and flattery of her lover
So sings Vrajanatha that the lotus-seated (Laxmi) arranged.
To be united in love with her lover.

In this way while narrating a religious festival, the poet has introduced in to the poem rare charm and beauty by depicting the element of human love along with its pleasure and pathos. On the completion of the poem the poet has appended a *Churanaka*, a passage in poetic prose in praise of Gajapati Divya Singha Dev.

17. *Vrajanatha Granthavali*, P. 675

5
Thought and Style

Of all the ancient and medieval poets of Orissa Vrajanatha appears to be the greatest experimentalist. The hall-mark of his writing is variety : variety in theme, language, metre and style. The themes of his work cover a wide range including the ecstatic love sports of Krishna, Radha and the Gopis, the divine love of Shiva and Parvati as well as the earthly love of men and women of different ranks ; heroic battles fought by a valiant chief and his patriotic men against a superior force, the grim ironies of life then encountered in society and the royal court and the sad plight of an indigent artist like himself. He could wield a variety of diction and style to suit his varied themes. He used with equal ease and competence the refined Sanskritised diction characteristic of the poetry of his age as well as the spoken language and idiom of the common man of his time. A great experimentaltist in metre and versification, he not only made some innovations but also harnessed some well-known existing metres to new use. His style is flexible tending towards the literary patterns of the modern age.

As a man of wide outlook and deep understanding, he instead of writing for the elite and the learned, preferred to write for all types of people and used the spoken language as the chief medium of expression. He succeeded in giving the spoken language its pride of place and wrote stories for the enjoyment of all types of people. His work of prose *Chatura Vinoda* and a poem *Gopi Boli* are bright examples of such writing.

The influence of time and environment is insurmountable. It is but natural that poets and their writings are affected by it. Vrajanatha in the prime of his literary career could not free himself from the dominating influence of *Reeti Kavya*, could not desist from decorating his poems with rhetorical devices and stylistic features like the word play. As a result of this his earlier works such as *Keli-Kalanidhi*, *Shyama Rasotsava*,*Vichakshana* and *Ambika Vilasa* are rich in the use of rhetorical figures both pertaining to the use of words and to the meanings or idea, otherwise known as

Sabdalankara and *Arthalankara* respectively. In them we find different types of *Yamaka, Slesha, Anuprasa* and *Upama,* etc., used profusely. Besides, the poet has also used different figures of speech of the category of Sabdalankara, such as *Shrinkhala, Drishtanta, Vyajastuti, Virodhabhasa, Sarosthaka, Ashaya, Antarlipi, Chyutakshara, Dattakshra,* etc. Using the words that begin with अ (a) श (sha) and व (v) in each line he has composed three poems named as *Ambika Vilasa, Shyama Rasotsava* and *Vichakshana* respectively.

Influenced by the poem *Premasudhanidhi* of Upendra Bhanja he wrote his earliest work *Kelikalanidhi.* The meaning of *Kalanidhi* and *Sudhanidhi* are the same (i.e., the moon). Both the poems have the same number of cantos. In the use of rhetories, language and ideas there are many similarities. However, at places he has taken recourse to the use of rhetorical devices in a more foreceful manner, as seen in the prayer written in monosyllabic words, the prayer to the ten incarnations of Vishnu in disyllabic words, the prayer to Cupid in words of three syllables and the prayer to the moon in words of four syllables. In this way, he has illustrated jugglery of words by using words with syllables upto ten in number.

His originality emerges even in his earlier writings in respect of his use of similes, metaphors and the accepted poetic conceits (*Kavi Prasidhi*). Deviating from the traditional nature of rhetorical devices, his similes and metaphors are realistic in nature being culled from the ordinary and commonplace situations and feelings. A few examples may be cited here.

(a) Cupid is ready to smash me

Like a goat which eats away the creepers before it.

(b) Their hardness relaxed like the sagging breast of an old lady.

(c) He who finds joy in Mohula can never be interested in sugar (The dried flowers of Mahula are sweet, scented and intoxicating).

(d) The contact between the debauche and the prostitute is like the hoarse voice of some throat afflicted with cough and cold.

(e) Like a fish swimming upstream recoiling at the sight of the uplifted stick of the fisherman, I withdrew.

(f) Like a snake furious when it is beaten, like an elephant prodded with an *ankusa* it moved fast (*Ankush* is a sharp trident-like instrument specially used in prodding elephants).

Describing the appearance of a fair complexioned Gopi reclining on the shoulder of Shree Krishna in course of Rasa Leela, the poet says, "Is it a golden lamp burning bright on the blue stand or the autumnal full moon shining brightly against black clouds ?" Describing the lazy movement of a lady returning after nocturnal enjoyment from her bed chamber in the morning the poet writes—

> Lo : the lady is exhausted and trudges along the way
> like a she-elephant caught in the trap
> emerging out of the pit.

In his poetry we find the use of Oriya metres such as *Mangala Gujjari, Ashadha sukla, Kousika, Chakrakeli*, etc. It has rightly been said in this connection that "he has used the same metres that Bhanja and his followers used for romances and with equally good effect, to describe war-like preparations and actual battles. That is another credit to Vadajena, as he revealed new strength and utility in the metres that had been employed for centuries for quite other purposes".[1] Besides, the poet has used the Sanskrit metres *Prithvi, Rathoddhata, Sardulavikridita*, etc., in the Sanskrit slokas composed by him. He has also successfully used a few Hindi and Bengali metres.

A special feature of the poet's literary skill consists in his minute descriptions. In each of his narrative poems he has described the childhood sports of the heroine, her attainment of puberty, her wearing different types of jewellery, her make-up for union with the lover, her actual union with the hero, her condition when she returns from her bed chamber, and the lover's coaxing words spoken for the appeasement of the beloved. Most of these descriptions, however, are of traditional nature. There is little originality in them for these are described purely according to the pattern of the *Reeti Kavyas*. In fact the originality of his descriptive power is manifested in the description of the military forces—the

1. Dr. M. Mansingh, *History of Oriya Literature*, p.161

cavalry, the infantry and the soldiers on the elephants, the preparations for war and the warfare itself, the royal procession, the Royal court, the duties of the kings, etc. These descriptions in his work are realistic and lively. This was possible because of the poet's involvement in and direct experience of war and his close association with the courts of different ruling chiefs. Needless to say that such descriptions are rare in the poems of the medieval and ancient Oriya literature. He has also described in detail the procession of the marriage party, the practices associated with Hindu marriage, the special kinds presentations known as dowry, modes of entertainment and food items peculiar to Orissa.

His description of nature is also noteworthy. The ancient and medieval Oriya poets in presenting the phenomena of nature, such as the morning, the evening and the six seasons, were mostly following the tradition or projecting their own imagination regardless of actuality. Hence, the peculiarities of nature in particular places could not find due expression in their poetry. But Vrajanatha, for the first time has successfully painted the natural beauties of a few places of Orissa including Puri, Keonjhar, the mountain Gonasika, the birth place of the sacred river Vaitarani, Dhenkanal, his native town, and the mountain nearly Kapilasa, a sacred place and a place of exquisite scenic beauty. This speaks of the poet's close observation of the beauties of nature.

The poet has also followed the traditional manner of describing nature. For instance in *Keli Kalanidhi* and in *Ambika Vilasa* descriptions of different seasons are almost stereotyped. Similarly his descriptions of Kashi Nagar (Varanasi) and the Himalayas in his work *Ambika Vilasa* are highly artificial and based simply on imagination because of his lack of direct knowledge about these two places.

In the stories of *Chatura Vinoda* the poet's descriptions are mostly humorous. His descriptions of the state of a kingdom, the physiognomy of its king and queen, the boasting of the astrologer, the physician, the brahmin and the barber, the characteristic features of the persons who are laughed at and the way in which different types of people approach a mendicant with their peculiar presents illustrate his comic art.

The beauty of a queen is described thus in *Hasya Vinoda* section of *Chatura Vinoda* :

Neelandhari, the queen was as beatiful as the banana plant
Her breasts were long and forehead elevated;
Her eyes were red like hibiscus flowers, her skin diamond white;
Her beautiful nose conch-shaped, her voice like the cry of a peacock;
Her charming heavy feet raise sky-splitting sounds as she walks
Her waist was fat like a mridanga (drum)
And her barren, plump, bulging belly
Looked as if she was carrying for the tenth month.

In *Gundicha Vije*, the Hindi poem, the poet's descriptions are realistic.

In it he has described the different phases of the car festival, the beautiful figures of the Devadasis, the noisy and the disturbed atmosphere during the festival and the different articles of offering to the deities in a vivid and realistic way.

To understand the past in its proper perspective is extremely difficult. The tone, the spirit and the form of literature undergo changes according to the socio-cultural and political transformations. Most of the authors fail to march with the time or foresee the distant future and thus are pushed to oblivion. It is only the talented few who survive and are remembered as fore-runners and path-finders. It is becuase they think and speak ahead of their times. Vrajanatha, unlike the poets of his period, is of a different order. He is more akin and closer to us and has expressed our thoughts and feelings. So we are able to understand him better than his contemporaries.

It is gratifying to note that the poet inspite of his association with the court neither turned to be a court poet of the then ruling chiefs nor was dominated by the court life of the period. He was of an independent spirit, dauntless and courageous. The strained circumstances and the financial straits at times have rather compelled him to write in praise of his patron. But the poet has used his free judgement to point out the stigmas in the characters of the ruling chiefs including his patron Raja Trilochana. In his *Samara Taranga* he has given a dreadful picture of the punishments inflicted by the Raja on his enemies :

Some lie horizontally like bedsteads
And some stand like chairs
In some the ankles are fastened to wooden traps
And some are pilloried.
Some are skinned alive
And of some the heads are pounded like paddy in the *Dhenki.*[2]
Some are mounted upon a pointed spear which
pierces the body through the anus.[3]

In the course of describing the grandeur of Raja Trilochan a his patron in *Raja Sabha* the poet has also disclosed the nature of his cruelty and oppression. The ruling chiefs of his times were whimsical. The poet writes : "The ways of the masters are difficult to understand. Servants, both male and female, are put to blame for no fault of theirs."[4] Raja Trilochana was also not free from these drawbacks.

Being associated with different princely states of Orissa, he has gathered a lot of knowledge and experience of the political condition of the country, particularly of the mal-administration and the inefficiency of the ruling chiefs and the pitiable condition of the subjects. With the purpose of making the oppressive and incapable rulers realise their duty towards their subjects he has formulated a code of conduct, *Rajadharma*, for the rulers in his *Ambika Vilasa.* In passages that have little relevance to the main text, the poet in detail has stated the precepts of politics for the guidance in general of the ruling chiefs of his times. He has boldly stated that the main concern of the ruling chiefs is to work for the well-being and statisfaction of their subjects instead of oppressing them.

These reveal his deep sympathy for the down-trodden. The peasant who is engaged in tilling the soil and feeding the people was then considered to be insignificant in society. The poet earnestly urges that the peasants should get their rightful place in society and should be free from oppression.

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2. *Dhenki* is a heavy long wooden device used to pound paddy.
3. *Rajasabha*, v. 41
4. *Ambika Vilasa*, canto 40

The tiller is not different from
The common subjects of the state,
Nothing is more harmful to the king,
Than when the tiller sheds tear. [5]

To remind their duties to the then rulers, unsympathetic towards the needy and poor peasants, the poet wrote :

There is no greater piety in the world
Than to satisfy the myriads of people. [6]

The poet's patriotism and love for his homeland is easily discernible in his *Samara Taranga*. In this poem he has not only described the glories and greatness of his patron but also has aimed at showing the military prowess of the armies of Orissa during his period.

There is no trace of pessimism or cynicism in his works inspite of his suffereings, set-backs and the neglect received by him. On the other hand, there is a robust optimism underlying his presentation of the different facets of life and different shades of emotions, a deep sense of love for life, and often a feeling of confidence and serenity. He has described the deep attachment between the lover and the beloved, their fun and frolics, playful jokes, light-hearted banter and humour, their ardent desire for physical union and its joyous realization.

The poet has also successfully depicted different sentiments such as the heroic, the erotic, the pathetic, the comic, the furious, the disgusting and the quietistic. No less prominent is his deep sense of morality and his devotion to gods and goddeses especially to Lord Jagannatha. Though born in a Vaishnava family his religious views were far above narrow sectarianism. Vishnu and Jagannatha as well Shiva and Sakkti (Durga and Vimala) he worshipped without any discrimination. According to the poet, "Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva are identical. There is no difference between Radha and Durga. It is only the ignorant who sees difference between them. "[7]

5. *Ambika Vilasa*, canto 40/64-65
6. *Ibid*, canto 40/58
7. *Ambika Vilasa*, canto 39, v. 82-83

Above all, it is significant to note the poet's humanistic views. His works reflect a deep sense of sympathy for the common man inspite of the frailties and weaknesses of human nature. Emphatically again and again he has harped upon this. He knew it well that clever, cunning and treacherous people often win the race and the honest and the simple folks fail to reach the goal. Describing the qualities of the cunning persons he writes," The deceitful and the treacherous are not trapped easily because of their slyness.'[8] During the period of the poet the subjects in the feudatory states were forced to work without any payment for their labour. They were like slaves and bonded labourers.

The rainy season in those days was considered to be the worst of all seasons. But for a section of the people like the thieves it was an opportune time to indulge in their criminal activities. The poet records with sorrow the looting and plundering of the belongings of the people.[9] He was so much moved by the plight of the poor that he never failed to give expression to their grievances in his writing. Even during the car festival of Lord Jagannatha, among the vast congregation of people of different strata of society such as kings, brahmnis, saints, sannyasis and merchants he has taken notice of the poor and the helpness. Thus the poet describes :

Here is the royal show of wealth,
There the handsome group of priests,
Here stand Giri, Puri, Digamvara
(The mendicants of different order)
There the shelter of the saints,
Here is pitched the tent of the Nawab,
There spread the stalls of merchants,
Here are seen the Dandi scholars and Pundits,
There stand the wretched poor.[10]

Another aspect of the poet's mind and his conscious thought process discernible from his writings is his appreciation of bravery and manly qualities or *pourusha*. He was not like other poets of the

8. *Keli-Kalanidhi*, canto 13, v. 21
9. *Vichakshana*, canto 9, v. 7
10. *Gundicha Vije*

Reeti Age. These poets were only after describing women, their beauty and nature and its effect on men. They were indifferent to portraying the heroic aspect, the bravery and sternness of human nature. But Vrajanatha the poet did not like to be lost in a world of imagination. He realized well that man has to perform certain duties towards the society. So he emphatically said :

Mean is the man who anoints his body with camphor and sandal-wood paste
And adorns himself with gold and jewel
And possesses Indra's wealth at home.
But whose heart trembles on seeing blood.
His enjoyment is really his disease.[11]

That the poet was not always romantic like his contemporaries is evident from his works. To a great extent he was anti-romantic and realistic.

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that the poet, a versatile scholar adept in different languages, arts and crafts had a new way of thinking. Discarding the contemporary and conventional trend he opened a new path in the field of literature. The thirteen books of his so far available speak of his original talent and the excellence of his creativity. The main characteristic of his literary output is the introduction of the spirit of realism and robust optimism in literature inspite of the sufferings and frustrations of his life. He has indirectly revolted against the social inequality and royal injustice and has tried to discover new frontiers through his experiments in the field of form and content of literature. His liking for different languages and people testifies to his magnanimity and pan-Indian consciousness. Hence, one may justifiably conclude with the following words of the celebrated poet-critic late Mayadhar Mansingh, "Only with the change of values in literature in recent years, is Vadajena being gradually recognised as the most modern of all the writers in old Oriya literture. He has successfully experimented with several styles of literary composition which no one in Orissa had tried before, and even in what he wrote in the traditional manner, he has left the deep impress of a strong

11. *Samara Taranga*., canto 5. v. 20

individuality. By certain standards he may not be great but he was a daring pioneer, an artist with ways of doing things all his own, an unflinchingly original mind that refused to toe the line, one who has left behind contributions to the national heritage of his people that are absolutely unique and precious."[12]

12. Dr. M. Mansingh, *History of Oriya Literature*, p. 155

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KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

Abana	Abanā
Adbhuta Upama	Adbhuta Upamā
Adya Yamaka	Ādya Yamaka
Ambika Vilasa	Ambikā Vilāsa
Ashada	Āshāda
Betal	Betāl
Chandi Malasri	Chandī Malaśrī
Chautisa	Chutīsā
Chhanda	Chhānda
Chhappaya	Chhappayā
Choupai	Choupāi
Churnaka	Chūrnaka
Dasa Poi	Daśa Poi
Dhaga	Ḍhaga
Dhamali	Dhamāli
Dardhyata Bhakti	Dardhatā Bhakti
Dhenkanal	Dhenkānāl
Doha	Dohā
Dutika	Dūtikā
Gopi	Gopī
Gundicha Vije	Gundichā Vije
Hukadar	Hukādār
Jagannatha	Jagannātha
Kalas	Kalās
Kamala	Kamalā
Kasi Nagar	Kaśi Nagar
Keli-kalanidhi	Keli-kalānidhi
Khoratha Boli	Khorathā Boli
Khuripal	Khuripāl
Krupanidhi	Krupānidhi
Kumara (Kartikeye)	Kumāra (Kārtikeya)

Kundarekha	Kundarekhā
Kusalakarna	Kuśalakarnā
Malashree	Mālashree
Matra	Mātrā
Niladri	Nilādrī
Padia	Padiā
Pranta	Prānta
Premasudhanidhi	Premasudhānidhi
Priyavati	Priyavatī
Pundarika	Pundarīka
Rajananku Chhalokti	Rājananku Chhalokti
Raja Sabha	Rāja Sabhā
Rasakala	Rasakalā
Rasavati	Rasavatī
Sa	Śa
Sabaiya	Sabaiyā
Sakara Niyama	Śakāra Niyama
Sarala Das	Saralā Dās
Siva	Śiva
Srunkhala	Śrunkhalā
Subhadra	Śubhadrā
Sudarsana	Sudarśana
Suprabhamsuprabha	Suprabhāmsūprabhā
Syamala	Śyamalā
Syama Rasotsava	Śyāma Rāsotsava
Tamasika	Tāmasika
Uma	Umā
Vichakshana	Vichakshanā
Vivodha Rupaka	Vivodha Rūpaka
Vrajanatha Vadajena	Vrajanātha Vadajenā
Vrndavana	Vṛndavana
Yamuna	Yamunā
Yavanika	Yāvanika

While reflecting on the political events and the cultural anthropology of the eighteenth century in Orissa, a rare contrast between the two becomes obvious to every discerning reader. During this period Orissa was under the dual rule of the Marhattas and the Mughals, and since they were in constant conflict, Orissa, for the entire period, was torn by barren civil strife and disorder. At the same time, as if being true to the dialectics of history, this age also gave birth to an outstanding literary avant-garde, Vrajanatha Vadajena. In sharp contrast with the sterility of the age, he fertilized the flowers of creation with the zeal of a bee in search of nectar. For economic and other reasons he had to cling to the crass tanacity of life and its diligent pains but that never turned his vision grey. He has successfully experimented with several styles of literary composition which no one in Orissa tried before, and even in what he wrote in the traditional manner, he has left the deep impress of a strong individuality. His liking for different languages and people testifies to his magnanimity and pan-Indian consciousness. With the change of values in literature in recent years, he is being gradually recognised as the most modern of all the writers in Old Oriya Literature.

Dr Janaki Ballabha Mohanty, formerly a University Professor of Oriya, in this monograph has dwelt on Vrajanatha's life and creations in the perspective of the contemporary socio-political milieu.

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